United Nations E/CN.17/1998/8

# Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
24 March 1998

Original: English

**Commission on Sustainable Development**
Sixth session
20 April-1 May 1998

## National reporting to the Commission on Sustainable Development

### Report of the Secretary-General

*Summary*

The present report briefly discusses the history of national reporting to the Commission on Sustainable Development, including the current status of reporting to the Commission at its sixth session. Issues that are linked to national reporting and that have been taken up by the Commission since its first session, such as common access, streamlining of reporting requirements, indicators and regional exchange of national information, are also reviewed in context.

Emphasis is placed on making maximum use of this information, through succinct summary reference data, including tables, graphs and directories, and by the establishment of a database of official country information, to be updated on a continuous basis, and made available to all interested users at all times via the Internet's World Wide Web.

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# I. Introduction

1. Chapter 40 of Agenda 21[1] stressed the importance of providing decision makers with information that would assist them in formulating integrated strategies, policies and plans related to sustainable development and all of its constituent parts. Since its first session, the Commission on Sustainable Development has emphasized the need for reliable, accessible and streamlined information both for national-level decision-making and for its own deliberations. The present discussion summarizes the experience of the past six years and suggests modalities that may be pursued in the future.

# II. Voluntary national reporting to the Commission on Sustainable Development

2. At its first session in 1993, the Commission on Sustainable Development decided to invite Governments and organizations to submit information to the Commission, on a voluntary basis, at its second, third and fourth sessions in order to allow it to monitor progress at the national level in the implementation of Agenda 21.

3. A more comprehensive approach was adopted for reporting to the fifth session of the Commission, in preparation for the nineteenth special session of the General Assembly to review and appraise the implementation of Agenda 21. The Assembly, in paragraph 13 (b) of its resolution 50/113 of 20 December 1995, requested the Secretary-General to prepare country profiles providing a concise presentation of progress made and constraints encountered in implementing Agenda 21 at the national level, compiled on the basis of national information received and in close cooperation with the Governments concerned. One hundred and one countries submitted country profiles to the Commission in 1997.

4. Most recently, the General Assembly, in paragraph 133 (b) of the annex to its resolution S/19-2 of 28 June 1997, adopted at its nineteenth special session, decided that the Commission on Sustainable Development should continue to provide a forum for the exchange of national experience and best practices in the area of sustainable development, including through voluntary national communications or reports. For this purpose, guidelines were prepared for reporting to the sixth session of the Commission, with specific reference to the items in the agenda of that session.

5. Prior to the fifth session of the Commission, the proportion of those reporting ranged from approximately one third of all Member States (in 1995), to a figure as low as one fifth in 1996, and back up to over one half in 1997. One can assume that there have been many reasons for low levels of response, including insufficient capacity to prepare reports, inadequate access to information at the national level, inadequate coordination of information at the national level and the burden put on countries to report to an increasing number of intergovernmental forums.

6. In addition, questions have been raised about the usefulness of the information. One of the main purposes of reporting (though not the only one) was to use the country information as an integral part of the substantive reports being provided to the Commission at each of its sessions. In fact, this has rarely been possible. Reports of the Secretary-General have to be prepared well in advance of the session of the Commission in order to allow time for editing, translation and distribution; however, national reports have, on the average, been submitted past the suggested deadline, and well after the date at which the reports of the Secretary-General had to be finalized. This has led to a situation in which States have been

sharing information with the United Nations Secretariat but not with each other, except through national presentations given during the sessions of the Commission itself.

7. Last year, a new mechanism was put in place by the United Nations Secretariat in order to ensure that all of the information was available to all States and other interested users on a continuous basis. This mechanism is the United Nations System-wide Sustainable Development Web Site,[2] discussed below.

## III. Common and compatible access to United Nations system information on sustainable development: the Web site

8. The Commission on Sustainable Development, at its third session, in April 1995, noted the importance of developing, among the organizations of the United Nations system, a common or compatible system of access to their respective databases, in order to share data fully, to streamline the collection and interpretation of data and to identify data gaps, for the purpose of providing more comprehensive and integrated data to decision makers at the national, regional and international levels.[3]

9. In response to this request, a series of inter-agency and expert meetings were organized. The primary result was the decision to establish a sustainable development Web site[4] that would link information across the United Nations system, with a primary focus on official country information. For each country, information is divided into social, economic, natural resource and institutional issues.[5] This Web site was established in 1997, and the country profiles prepared for the fifth session of the Commission have been used to establish a core database on the site. Furthermore, with the proliferation of national Web sites, links are being made to official country sites as well as to other United Nations system sites.

10. This means that (a) all national information submitted to the Commission is now available to Member States and all other interested users on a permanent basis; and (b) that the information is being continuously updated. Countries may submit new information at any time, and on any issue, and that information will be reflected on the Web site. The establishment of an accessible database such as this should also help to overcome the time constraints now faced by task managers in the preparation of documentation for the Commission.

## IV. Streamlining of national reporting requirements

11. At its fourth session, in April 1996, the Commission noted that, in the period following the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, States were being confronted with a growing number of reporting requirements in the field of sustainable development, and it requested the Secretary-General to make proposals at the fifth session of the Commission for streamlining national reporting related to sustainable development.[6] These are contained in document E/CN.17/1997/6 of 18 March 1997.

12. Further to these proposals, the United Nations Secretariat developed and has provided an updated calendar of reporting requirements for United Nations system organizations and relevant convention secretariats on the Web site of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs,[7] and it has continued to work with other organizations on streamlining, through the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC) and its subcommittees, as well as on a bilateral basis. In addition, the streamlining process has been linked to the parallel

exercises of ensuring common access to United Nations system databases and maintaining the United Nations System-wide Sustainable Development Web Site. It is anticipated that, by making information available electronically, on a country-by-country basis, the secretariats concerned will find it easier to share national information and avoid duplication of requests to Governments.

## V. Regional exchange of national information

13. In paragraph 133 (c) of the annex, entitled "Programme for the further implementation of Agenda 21", to its resolution S/19-2, the General Assembly noted that the Commission for Sustainable Development should provide a forum for the exchange of experience on regional and subregional initiatives and regional collaboration for sustainable development. This could include the promotion of voluntary regional exchange of national experience in the implementation of Agenda 21 and, *inter alia*, the possible development of modalities for reviews within regions by and among those countries that voluntarily agree to do so.

14. This issue has been researched during late 1997 and early 1998, and it was one of two major items in the agenda of a meeting of regional organizations convened in New York in February 1998. Background information and proposals for the consideration of the Commission on Sustainable Development are contained in document E/CN.17/1998/9, which is before the Commission at its sixth session.

## VI. Indicators

15. The programme of work that has been undertaken on behalf of the Commission to develop indicators of sustainable development is an exercise separate from national reporting to the Commission. From the beginning, the indicators have been seen as being of primary use for augmenting and systematizing information available for decision-making at the national level. Furthermore, testing of the indicators is currently under way, and a revised list of indicators is foreseen as appearing by the year 2000, at which time it will be again submitted to the Commission. Information on the status of this programme is contained in background document, No. 18, entitled "Status report on the implementation of the Commission on Sustainable Development work programme on the indicators of sustainable development", before the Commission at its sixth session.

16. At the same time, on many occasions, individual countries have expressed the view that national reporting to the Commission could be enhanced by the use of some common indicators which would lend themselves to monitoring progress in the implementation of Agenda 21. In the past year, an effort has been made to use some qualitative "yes" or "no" indicators, specifically in relation to questions of institutions, policies and international legal instruments, in order to provide a tabular basis for time-series data. This information is contained in background document, No. 23, entitled "Assessment of progress in the implementation of Agenda 21 at the national level: summary tables and graphs". The Commission may find more specific, indicator-type questions useful to it in the future.

## VII. Reporting to the Commission on Sustainable Development at its sixth session

17. Guidelines for reporting to the Commission at its sixth session were sent to all States Members of the United Nations in August 1997. These guidelines requested information on all of the agenda items to be discussed at the sixth session, including freshwater, industry, technology, science, education and awareness-raising, finance, capacity-building, and the outstanding chapters to be reviewed from the Barbados Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States[8] as well as general policy- and institution-related questions, as indicated above. As of mid-March 1998, approximately 40 countries had responded. Where relevant, the information provided was used to update, on the World Wide Web site,[9] the country information that had been submitted to the Commission at its fifth session. Information provided for 1998 by countries that had not previously submitted country profiles was also posted on the Web site, and this, too, will be updated as new information becomes available.

18. In addition, the cumulative, updated information derived from both the country profiles and the 1998 guideline responses have been summarized in four background documents, available to the Commission at its sixth session. The titles and numbers of these are as follows: "Assessment of progress in the implementation of Agenda 21 at the national level: summary tables and graphs" (Background paper, No. 23); "Assessment of progress in the implementation of Agenda 21 at the national level: table of key coordination mechanisms and actions" (Background paper, No. 24); "List of official sustainable development contacts" (Background paper, No. 25); and "List of official World Wide Web sites identified by Governments in their national reporting to the Commission on Sustainable Development" (Background paper, No. 26).

## VIII. Summary

19. National reporting to the Commission on Sustainable Development has evolved over the past five years and continues to do so. It has taken into account issues of streamlining and of "regionalization"; it has sought to inform discussion of specific items in the agenda of the Commission; and it has provided succinct summary reference data, through tables, graphs and directories, for the Commission's use. Perhaps most importantly, the broadening of access to this national information afforded by the World Wide Web site encourages use of the data throughout the year, and not only when the Commission is in session. Finally, greater access permits use by all interested parties, thereby promoting information exchange, streamlining and the public participation intrinsic to sustainable development.

## IX. Proposal

20. It is proposed that future voluntary national reporting to the Commission continue to focus on the specific agenda items of each session, specifically by updating baseline information already provided in the 1997 country profiles, where available. This would imply that, by the time of the 10-year review of the implementation of Agenda 21 in the year 2002, the Commission and the General Assembly would have ready access to the information they will require. Furthermore, subject to the decision of the Commission regarding regional exchange of national information, this information may have gained additional value through analysis and evaluation at the regional level.

*Notes*

[1] *Report of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, Rio de Janeiro, 3-14 June 1992*, vol. I, *Resolutions Adopted by the Conference* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.93.I.8 and corrigendum), resolution 1, annex II.

[2] The United Nations System-wide Sustainable Development Web Site is located at the following Internet address: http://www.un.org/esa/agenda21/natlinfo/

[3] See *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 1995, Supplement No. 12* (E/1995/32), chap. I, para. 7.

[4] Background information is contained in documents E/CN.17/1996/18 and Add.1, and E/CN.17/1997/6, annex III.

[5] Social issues include poverty, demographics, health, education and human settlements; economic issues include international cooperation and trade, changing consumption patterns, financing, technology, industry, transport and sustainable tourism; natural resource issues include agriculture, atmosphere, biodiversity, desertification and drought, energy, forests, freshwater, land management, mountains, oceans and coastal areas, toxic chemicals, and waste and hazardous materials; and institutional issues include integrated decision-making, major groups, science, information and international law. Links are also made under each of these four files to relevant official indicators available on the Internet.

[6] See *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 1996, Supplement No. 8* (E/1996/28), chap. I, sect. C, decision 4/8, para. 6.

[7] This information is located at the following World Wide Web address: http://www.un.org/dpcsd/earthsummit/stream/calend-n.htm.

[8] *Report of the Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States, Bridgetown, Barbados, 25 April-6 May 1994* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.94.I.18 and corrigenda), chap. I, resolution 1, annex II.

[9] That is to say, the United Nations System-wide Sustainable Development Web Site, located at: http://www.un.org/esa/agenda21/natlinfo/

United Nations E/CN.17/1998/9

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
9 March 1998

Original: English

**Commission on Sustainable Development**
Sixth session
20 April-1 May 1998

# Modalities for the exchange of national experiences at the regional level

## Report of the Secretary-General

*Executive summary*

In paragraph 133 (c) of the Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21, the General Assembly noted that the Commission for Sustainable Development "should provide a forum for the exchange of experience on regional and subregional initiatives and regional collaboration for sustainable development. This could include the promotion of voluntary regional exchange of national experience in the implementation of Agenda 21 and, *inter alia*, the possible development of modalities for reviews within regions by and among those countries that voluntarily agree to do so."

In order to explore the issues regarding such regional exchanges and the ways in which the Commission might promote them, a review of existing modalities for the exchange of information was undertaken. The modalities included conferences, workshops and seminars; voluntary national reporting; mandatory national reporting; surveillance consultations; and country policy reviews. The findings and options that emerged from the review were discussed at a consultative meeting of regional organizations held in New York from 4 to 6 February 1998.

The present report presents the results of the review and the recommendations of the consultative meeting for the consideration of the Commission. In general, it was concluded that a first step would be to devise a means to make better use of the voluntary national reporting to the Commission, to provide a regional focus for the exchange of that information, in addition to its submission to the Commission, and to use it to analyse trends within a region. In particular, the Commission may wish to support a proposal from the

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Economic Commission for Europe to test the conclusions of the review in a pilot project for the exchange of national experiences, subject to the availability of funding, in cooperation with other regional institutions of Europe, including non-governmental organizations, and the other regional commissions.

Attention is drawn to the need to continue support to countries to develop capacity in the areas of data collection, coordination and analysis and in building electronic networks for exchanging information at the national, regional and international levels.

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# I. Background

1. In the Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21, Member States agreed that the Commission on Sustainable Development should, *inter alia*, "continue to provide a forum for the exchange of national experience and best practices in the area of sustainable development, including through voluntary national communications or reports".[1] The Programme also notes that countries in given regions had much to gain from exchanging information on best practices and on national implementation of Agenda 21 and that there were transboundary issues which lent themselves specifically to regional cooperation. In that regard it was agreed that:

> "The Commission should take into account regional developments related to the implementation of the outcomes of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development. It should provide a forum for the exchange of experience on regional and subregional initiatives and regional collaboration for sustainable development. This could include the promotion of the voluntary regional exchange of national experience in the implementation of Agenda 21 and, *inter alia*, the possible development of modalities for reviews within regions by and among those countries that voluntarily agree to do so. In this context, the Commission should encourage the availability of funding for the implementation of initiatives related to such reviews".[2]

2. This recommendation by the Commission led to an exploration of the issues that would arise in promoting regional exchanges of information – for example, the timing and scope of such exchanges and their link to the Commission's work plan. What would countries gain? What, in effect, would be the added value of such exchanges and how would they be undertaken? In an attempt to answer these questions and present options, a review of the current reporting process of the Commission on Sustainable Development and of other existing models for exchanges of information or reviews, both regionally and internationally, was undertaken. The findings were presented to a consultative meeting[3] of regional institutions, organized by the Division for Sustainable Development (New York, 4-6 February). Issues of modality, focus and the periodicity of possible reviews were considered and discussed by the participants, in plenary, in working groups and in informal consultations. The results are reflected in the present paper, for the Commission's consideration.

# II. The reporting process so far

3. Voluntary national reporting to the Commission, which began in 1993 with general and open-ended queries, had evolved by 1997 into requests for comprehensive national profiles on the status of implementation of Agenda 21. During those years efforts were made to collect information more directly relevant to the agenda of the Commission and to streamline national reporting requirements throughout the United Nations system. Country reports are reviewed and analysed by the Secretariat as a source of information for the thematic reports prepared for each session of the Commission and as an indication of both international and regional trends. In addition, efforts continue to present the information received in a systematic and accessible format on a World Wide Web site[4] set up for the purpose.

4. The Commission has provided a forum for formal presentations of national experience during its regular sessions. Reporting to the Commission and the preparation of country profiles have served a number of important purposes, including:

(a) Bringing together an array of stakeholders at the national level to promote and guide strategies, review progress, interact and work towards a common assessment of the implementation of Agenda 21;

(b) Initiating or furthering national strategies for sustainable development;

(c) Strengthening internal dialogue;

(d) Spurring efforts to organize and coordinate the collection of information.

Reporting is also intended to raise public awareness by providing transparency and allowing the sharing of experiences and information. The interest generated by the country profiles, the country presentations to the Commission and, more recently, the Web site point to considerable success in achieving that objective.

5. In 1997, in response to the decision by the General Assembly at its nineteenth special session that reporting to the Commission should continue, guidelines were prepared and sent to Governments on the provision of information regarding the issues to be dealt with by the Commission at its sixth session. The information received was utilized in the preparation of reports to the Commission and is being used to update the country files on the Web site.

# III. Modalities for the exchange of information at the regional and international levels

6. Currently, information is shared at the regional, subregional and international levels through informal exchanges at conferences, workshops, and seminars; national reporting to intergovernmental bodies (both voluntary and mandatory); surveillance consultations; and policy reviews.[5]

### Conferences, workshops and seminars

7. In every region, the exchange of information on national policy and management experiences is undertaken within a framework of projects and seminars on sectoral and cross-sectoral themes carried out by regional and subregional organizations. The exchanges occur mostly in the context of priorities established at regional ministerial meetings and often in preparation for international meetings. In those cases the exchange of information and best practices may not be the specific focus of the discussion but emerge as by-products of a more technical or sectoral exchange.

### Voluntary national reporting

8. Voluntary reporting, similar to that requested by the Commission, is another mechanism widely used to assess implementation of agreements and for the exchange of information. In most cases countries provide reports to the secretariat of an intergovernmental body for review, analysis and summary. Examples include reporting in follow-up to the Summit on Social Development or to the Summit of the Americas on Sustainable Development.[6] Because requests for such reporting have multiplied over the past few years, following the series of major conferences and regional summits, an effort is currently being made to streamline reporting requirements. Consequently, the contours of periodic national reporting may change.

### Mandatory national reporting

9. Mandatory national reports, such as treaty reviews, are similar to voluntary national reports, with one major exception: reporting is an inherent part of compliance with the international legal instrument. Treaty reviews normally include reports due from countries according to a specific timetable with precise instructions for preparation and response. In some cases the responses go directly to intergovernmental bodies where they are reviewed; in others, they are first reviewed by the Secretariat which then forwards them to the intergovernmental body.

### Surveillance consultations

10. The International Monetary Fund has a mandate to exercise surveillance over the exchange rate policies of members in order to oversee the international monetary system and ensure its effective operation. The two principal means of surveillance are annual consultations with each member country, known as Article IV consultations, and the biannual World Economic Outlook discussions, which consider issues and policies from a global perspective.

### Country policy reviews

11. Country policy reviews are undertaken by an intergovernmental body at a session of that body, but only after considerable information-gathering and analysis has been carried out by either a secretariat or an expert group. In most cases the analytical work is based on, or relies heavily on, information supplied by the country being reviewed. It may involve a visit to the country for meetings with governmental officials and other authorities. The process normally results in a written product which is revised and published, pursuant to consideration by the intergovernmental body. In some cases, there is provision for the designation of "examining countries" or "discussants" who have a more active role than other participants – for example, in the OECD/ECE environmental performance reviews; the OECD economic and development reviews; the OECD reviews of development cooperation policies and programmes; the OECD agricultural policy reviews; the GATT/WTO trade policy reviews; and the science, technology and innovation policy reviews undertaken by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) on behalf of the Commission on Science and Technology for Development.[7]

# IV. Options for national exchanges of information on sustainable development at the regional level

12. After identifying the modalities listed above, the meeting examined issues such as the availability of data, the level of exchange, and the focus and the periodicity of the reviews. Three options for regional exchanges were found to be feasible:

(a) Information could be exchanged on issues related to the agenda of the Commission. Such an arrangement would allow for comparability of data, enrich the work of the Commission and streamline the preparation of reports. Regional meetings could be organized at which interested

countries could be invited to exchange best practices in the areas to be dealt with by the Commission. Countries with particularly successful strategies in a given area might wish to detail their success, costs, and policies for possible replication. The outcomes of these regional exchanges could be reported to the Commission;

(b) Information could be exchanged on issues related to priorities identified in the region itself, taking advantage of existing information exchange at, for example, ministerial meetings. This process could be enhanced by an additional component, specifically, the exchange of best practices in given areas;

(c) Countries willing to go beyond exchanges of information and of good practices and undertake reviews of national sustainable development policies could consider following a procedure similar to that used in the GATT/WTO trade policy reviews or the UNCTAD science, technology and innovation policy reviews. They could produce comprehensive reviews of the complete policy area and the extent to which sustainable development has been incorporated into regional decision-making, with a view to recommending specific follow-up actions.

## V. Conclusions

13. The consultative meeting came to the following conclusions:

(a) Value could be added to national information through regional and subregional analysis and exchange, and that could contribute to the work of the Commission on Sustainable Development in monitoring implementation of Agenda 21 and in evaluating the effectiveness of national and regional policies in achieving sustainable development objectives;

(b) The information to be exchanged should be relevant both to the agenda of the Commission and to regional priorities. It could be both sectoral and cross-sectoral, and would likely vary to some extent by region. Consensus on regional priorities should involve, in some regions, further consultations in order actively to engage finance ministries and development banks. No new or additional reporting should be required, and other sources of information on sustainable development should be included;

(c) For several regional institutions, issues of data availability and the development of information management systems at the country level are a major concern. In many cases, basic data for reporting and thus for exchanges of information are not available, and one objective might be to provide assistance to those countries to compile the required information. An important part of the process of regional information exchange, therefore, would also be an assessment by national Governments and regional and subregional institutions of the availability of information and databases on different disciplines related to sustainable development. There is need for additional support for the building of national capacity-building in this area;

(d) Exchange of information through workshops, technical meetings and seminars, involving all stakeholders, should continue, at both the regional and subregional levels. Electronic networks need to be established or strengthened on issues related to Agenda 21, in order to facilitate the exchange of best practices and other experience, to establish rosters of experts and focal points, and to push for the further organization of databases at the national level;

(e) Voluntary national reporting to the Commission continues to be a high-priority means of exchanging national information, and it is an important source of information for other national Governments, regional institutions and civil society as a whole. Peer reviews are extremely valuable as a means of information exchange, monitoring and feedback, but they are capital- and labour-intensive and rely on access to good information infrastructure. Their application in regions outside of Europe and in non-European member States of OECD remains a long-range, not an immediate, goal.

14. Overall, it was concluded that, at this point in time, a first step would be to devise a means to make better use of the voluntary national reporting process to the Commission, to provide a regional focus for the exchange of the information, in addition to its submission to the Commission, and to use it to analyse trends within a region.

## VI. Action by the Commission

15. The Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) has proposed a test of the above conclusions in a pilot project for the exchange of national experiences at the regional level. The Commission may wish to endorse that proposal. The project, subject to the availability of funding, would be undertaken in cooperation with other regional organizations in Europe, including non-governmental organizations. The other regional commissions would also be invited to participate.

16. Pursuant to a request from the Commission on Social Development, ECE would take responsibility for an ongoing process of analysis which would:

(a) Review all country and EU reports submitted to the Commission in a given year as well as other relevant documents;

(b) Define an appropriate modality for a comparative analysis of the progress made by the countries in those areas being considered by the Commission;

(c) Provide an inventory of best practices and, if appropriate, an assessment;

(d) Review national priorities and analyse the extent to which national priorities coincide with regional priorities and concur with priorities of the Commission.

17. After preparations, a workshop would be organized to discuss the background analysis and recommend action to be taken, with emphasis on policy formulation and capacity-building. The workshop would also assess the value of the pilot project and suggest the next steps, including, for example, the establishment of a mechanism to assure ongoing implementation and periodicity of such reviews. The results of the workshop would be submitted to the Commission and would be shared with other regional institutions.

18. Governments and other donors are invited to support the implementation of the pilot project, consistent with paragraph 133 (c) of the "Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21".[2]

19. The Commission may also wish to encourage additional support for capacity-building in the area of data collection and information technology, on the basis of the results of the review and of the regional consultations. It may also wish to provide a window for presentations on some of the interesting regional initiatives that are taking place in implementing Agenda 21.

*Notes*

[1] General Assembly resolution S/19-2, annex, para. 133 (b).

[2] Ibid., para. 133 (c).

[3] Participants included representatives from the following organizations: for Africa, the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) Regional Office for Africa, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Regional Office for Africa, the African Development Bank, the Organization of African Unity (OAU), and the Southern African Development Community (SADC); for Asia, the Pacific and Western Asia, the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), UNEP Regional Office for West Asia, UNDP Regional Bureau for Arab States, UNDP Asia/Pacific Bureau, Asian Development Bank, Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN), the South Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP), and the South Asia Cooperative Environment Programme (SACEP); for Europe, the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE), UNDP Bureau for Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States, and the European Commission; for North America, Latin America and the Caribbean, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC, Santiago), ECLAC Subregional Headquarters for the Caribbean, UNEP Regional Office for North America, UNEP Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean, UNDP Bureau for Latin America and the Caribbean, the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB), and the Organization of American States (OAS). At the international level, the United Nations, the United Nations Development Programme and the World Bank also participated.

[4] The Internet address is: http://www.un.org/esa/agenda21/natlinfo/.

[5] See the annex below for examples of the various modalities.

[6] Held in Santa Cruz de la Siena, Bolivia, in December 1996.

[7] See A/AC.237/63.

# Annex

## Examples of modalities for the exchange of information

1. The Secretariat solicited information from a number of regional and subregional organizations, including the regional commissions, on the various modalities of information exchange outlined above. Examples are provided below, for purposes of illustration only.

### A. Conferences, workshops and seminars

2. In the ECA region, within the context of the programme of the Joint Secretariat of the African Ministers Conference on the Environment (AMCEN), priority was given to support for capacity-building in the area of information and data collection. Ministers at the African High-level Ministerial Meeting on Environmental Impact Assessment (June 1995) decided that the establishment of a mechanism to promote information exchange on a regular basis required immediate action.

3. In the ECLAC region an extensive series of regional seminars and courses in priority sectors has taken place at which policy and management experiences were exchanged. The priority sectors were identified at various regional ministerial conferences. A symposium specifically dealing with environmental information and indicators was held in 1995.

4. ESCAP has implemented a project on environmental assessment under which the *1995 State of the Environment Report in the Asian and Pacific Region* was published.[a] The project involved the establishment of national focal points for state-of-the-environment reporting; guidelines were also published.

5. In addition, ESCAP organized a series of workshops and seminars on sectoral and cross-sectoral issues at which national experiences were exchanged. Overall, countries in the region have been making many efforts, with varying degrees of success, to integrate environmental considerations into their economic decision-making processes. There has been, however, little research on the effectiveness of the various modalities and instruments being used or on intercountry exchange of experiences to share best practices.[b] For that reason, ESCAP designed a special project, entitled "Integrating environmental considerations into economic decision-making processes", for the 1997-1998 biennium, specifically to review and exchange experiences, through a series of subregional and regional expert group meetings, on institutional prerequisites at the national, provincial, local and sectoral levels for integrated policy-making and on modalities of environmental assessment as tools for integrated decision-making processes, and to draw best practices from them.[c]

6. In 1995 the European Environmental Agency (EEA) of the European Community prepared a report on the state of the environment in the entire European region, covering nearly 50 countries. The assessment was initiated in 1991 at the first Conference of Pan-European Environment Ministers and was produced for the third "Environment for Europe" Ministerial Conference, held in Sofia in 1995. It sets a baseline for future monitoring and gives an overall view of the state of the environment and the pressures faced across the continent. It is accompanied by a statistical compendium prepared by the Statistical Office of the EU (Eurostat), EEA, ECE, the World Health Organization (WHO) and OECD. A progress report on the main environmental issues identified in the original assessment is being prepared for the next ministerial conference, to be held in Denmark in June 1998.

### B. Voluntary national reporting

7. The General Assembly requested Governments to assess national progress made in implementing the outcome of the Summit on Social Development on a regular basis, possibly in the form of periodic national reports outlining successes, problems and obstacles, and to submit such information on a voluntary basis to the Commission for Social Development.[d] Numerous countries have provided such information to the Commission, and through periodic communications, to the Secretary-General. The Summit also invited the regional commissions to organize biennial high-level evaluation meetings on progress made towards implementing the outcome of the Summit.

8. ECLAC organized the first such meeting in April of 1997. Participating countries presented reports on implementation of the commitments undertaken at the Summit; a ministerial round table was held on macroeconomic management and its impact on poverty; panel discussions were held on the three core issues of the Summit and the ECLAC secretariat presented a document entitled "The equity gap, Latin America, the Caribbean and the Social Summit". The Economic and Social Council, at its July 1997 session, invited other regions to convene

similar evaluation meetings. ESCAP complied by organizing one in its region in November 1997.

9. The OAS has been entrusted with the follow-up to the 1994 Summit of the Americas, held in Miami, and the Declaration of Santa Cruz, adopted at the 1996 Summit of the Americas, held in Santa Cruz de la Siena, Bolivia. Its Unit of Sustainable Development and Environment undertakes to facilitate the exchange of information related to sustainable development in the region. A reporting process was initiated in 1996. A request for information on the status of implementation was sent to 44 participating countries.

10. In the Arab region, the Centre for Environment and Development in the Arab Region and Europe, along with the Arab League, established the Arab Regional Environmental Information Network which contains data and information that member States of the Arab League have been requested to provide regarding their experiences in the implementation of the regional programmes for sustainable development. The secretariat of the Council of Arab Ministers Responsible for the Environment has convened meetings of regional experts to discuss the question of environmental indicators.

## C. Mandatory national reporting

11. The ILO reviews 171 conventions on the basis of country reports. There are no country visits; the secretariat prepares a report on its conclusions, which are reviewed by the Committee of Experts on Application of Conventions and Recommendations, in which workers and employers are welcome to take part, thus making the review a tripartite process.

12. The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change has a staggered reporting system whereby developed country parties were required to present reports in September 1994 and every three years thereafter, while developing country parties have three years after accession to report. The reports are reviewed by experts and summarized by the secretariat, which forwards them, as appropriate, to the Conference of Parties.

13. The European Union has an agreed regional programme of policy and action in relation to environment and sustainable development, elaborated on the basis of the European environmental treaties. The Union participates in the Commission process and speaks on behalf of its 15 member States on issues that are within the Union's legal competence. The agreed regional programme (fifth environmental action programme, Towards Sustainability) was adopted in 1992, and regular reporting has taken place on its implementation by the European Commission, most recently in a review published in 1996. In addition, the European Environment Agency prepared a report "Environment in the European Union" which updates the Community's *State of the Environment Report, 1992* and is partly based on the report referred to above in paragraph 6.

14. The human rights treaty system, established under the six operative international human rights treaties, consists of a voluntary system of self-monitoring by way of reporting, supervised by six independent and expert international committees. Each treaty provides that States parties will report periodically, generally every two to five years, on the measures they have adopted, to give effect to the rights enumerated in the respective treaty, the progress made in the enjoyment of those rights and any factors and difficulties affecting the fulfilment of the treaty's objectives. This is similar to most kinds of national reporting modalities.

15. The process becomes distinct through the review procedure. Each report is considered, in turn, by an international committee of independent experts in the presence of representatives of the State party in a public process of question and answer, or what is described as "constructive dialogue". The dialogue is non-contentious and non-adversarial and, although the treaty body may sometimes be openly critical of a State, there is no open accusation of human rights violation.

16. This system has been under intense scrutiny in recent years, with calls for its reform from many quarters. Although many are willing to admit the importance of reporting, most point to the fact that the reporting burden is overwhelming States and that consequently there is a very high rate of non-compliance in the submission of reports. In addition, a tremendous backlog exists in the review of reports once submitted, and human and financial resources available within the United Nations Secretariat for servicing the committees are inadequate and likely to diminish. This has led to calls for overhauling the system, *inter alia*, through the streamlining of reporting.

## D. Surveillance consultations

17. Surveillance through Article IV consultations is the primary channel for collaboration between IMF and its members. A staff team from IMF visits a given country to discuss with officials economic developments and the monetary, fiscal and structural policies that the authorities are following. The team also gathers relevant economic and financial information. Upon its return to its headquarters, the

team prepares a report analysing the economic situation and evaluating the stance of policies. The IMF Board discusses the report and, at the end of the discussion, the Chair of the Board summarizes the views expressed. The summary is transmitted to the country's authorities. Beginning in April 1997, the Board agreed to issue press information notices, on a voluntary basis, at the conclusion of the consultations.

## E. Country policy reviews

18. The OECD/ECE environmental performance reviews evaluate national plans and policies, legislation, organizational capacity, enforcement, compliance and monitoring. They also assess the extent to which environmental policies have been integrated into sectoral policies and how they relate to major groups, such as industry, non-governmental organizations and public interest groups. The reviews are relatively costly but effective tools for assessing the environmental situation in a country and assisting Governments in identifying the next steps to take to improve the environment. It is important to note that they also have the advantage of promoting capacity-building, not only by a thorough analysis of the situation but also, potentially, by bringing that information to the attention of the international community.

19. OECD carries out environmental performance reviews for all OECD countries; ECE supplements the process by carrying out reviews for those countries that are members of ECE but not OECD – i.e., the countries in transition in Eastern Europe. OECD undertakes from five to six reviews per year. To date, ECE has carried out reviews in cooperation with OECD for Poland, Bulgaria, Belarus, Estonia and Slovenia. Albania and Moldova are scheduled next.[e]

20. OECD and the ECE apply almost identical review mechanisms for their environmental performance reviews. The assessment on which a review is based is made by a delegation of experts sent to each country under review for a period of approximately 10 days. In the case of OECD, this is a large delegation, representing from eight to ten countries; for ECE, each delegation represents three countries.

21. In terms of methodology and scrutiny, the country reports on non-OECD countries do not differ markedly from country reports on OECD countries. All reports follow the same outline, examining the management of pollution control and natural resources, including air management (chap. 9 of Agenda 21), water management (chaps. 17 and 18), nature conservation and waste management (chaps. 10-15, 17 and 19-21); policy integration in country-specific sectors (chap. 8); and cooperation with the international community (chaps. 2, 34 and 37). The ensuing report (150-200 pages) is then reviewed by the Group on Environmental Performance of OECD.

22. Like the environmental reviews, the OECD economic and development reviews, reviews of development cooperation policies and programmes, and agricultural policy reviews are based on secretariat analysis and involve country visits, albeit shorter than for the environmental reviews (approximately one and one half days each). Only the reviews on development cooperation policies and programmes involve the examining countries. The results of these processes are studied by expert committees and two examining countries, which have a more active role than other participants in the process.

23. The GATT/WTO trade policy reviews are based on a country report prepared by the secretariat and include a country visit for a duration of from one to one and one half weeks. The reviewed country presents a parallel report. Both reports are reviewed by the GATT Council/WTO trade policy review body, which includes two examining country representatives, acting in their personal capacity. The conclusions of the review are then published.

24. Science, technology and innovation policy reviews were initiated in 1996 by UNCTAD, following a request by the Economic and Social Council in 1995.[f] Although based on the OECD science, technology and innovation reviews – at least from a procedural perspective – the UNCTAD reviews have been adapted to the needs and characteristics of the developing countries and countries in transition. They are not mandated and do not follow a given timetable, but rather are undertaken only at the request of a member State, providing that funds are made available.

25. The purpose of the reviews is to enable participating countries to evaluate the efficiency with which their scientific and technological as well as industrial, economic, educational and social institutions and mechanisms contribute to the development – particularly technological development – of their enterprises. The focus of the reviews is on the interrelationships among the various institutions and stakeholders in the participating country, particularly on the distribution of knowledge among all national agents.

26. Once a country has requested a science, technology and innovation policy review, a programming mission is undertaken by the secretariat to help decide the areas that will be covered. The national counterparts are then required to prepare an extensive background report, for which they bear the cost, describing and analysing the operation of their

country's relevant policies and institutions. Subsequently, a small group of international experts, including a member of the Commission on Science and Technology for Development, chosen jointly with the participating country and working with the secretariat, carries out an independent evaluation of the country's relevant conditions and policies.

27. When the expert assessment is finalized, and in order to bring the policy review to the attention of the local community, a round-table meeting is held between the experts and the key stakeholders in the science, technology and innovation system to discuss the conclusions and recommendations.

28. So far, one such review has been completed for Colombia; the 300-page report should be published in the near future. Another review is in process in Jamaica, and another is to be initiated shortly in Ethiopia. Depending on the size of the country and the economy (and therefore on the scope of the review), funds required for these reviews start at around $100,000. The reviews are co-funded by the reviewed country and donors. In the case of Colombia, UNDP provided funding; for Jamaica, it was the Government of the Netherlands. There are at present 11 additional countries which have requested such reviews and whose requests are under consideration, pending the availability of resources.

29. Whether legally binding as a condition of membership, or voluntary, national reviews are generally considered to be of considerable use to the client country. They are not meant to be punitive; rather, their purpose is to assemble, tap and share expertise from other countries – often countries with similar economic and social characteristics – and expertise available within international secretariats. Even where one of the intents is to monitor compliance with an international agreement, the review is directed towards assisting the given country to meet both its obligations and its own objectives, through more functional policies, better institutional coordination and integration, and capacity-building.

*Notes*

[a] See "Inventory of regional initiatives for sustainable development" (ACC/IACSD/VII/1996/CRP.11).

[b] See E/ESCAP/ESD(4)/8, p. 7.

[c] See E/ESCAP/ESD(4)/1, sect. I(B), and the ESCAP regional report to the Commission at its fifth session (E/CN.17/1997/Misc.68).

[d] See A/52/305.

[e] See ECE's regional report to the Commission at its fifth session (E/CN.17/1997/48).

[f] See E/CN.16/1997/5.

United Nations E/CN.17/1998/10

# Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
27 March 1998

Original: English

**Commission on Sustainable Development**
Sixth session
20 April-1 May 1998
Item 7 of the provisional agenda*
**High-level meeting**

## Main and emerging issues

### Report of the Secretary-General

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* E/CN.17/1998/1.

98-09322 (E) 170498 200498

# I. Introduction

1. Almost a year has passed since the General Assembly, at its nineteenth special session, reviewed progress achieved in five years since the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED). The assessment carried out by the Assembly clearly showed that in spite of a number of noticeable results in the implementation of Agenda 21 and the principles of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development at the local, national and international levels, much more remains to be done and greater political will must be mobilized in order to expedite progress towards shifting the path of world development to a more sustainable trajectory.

2. The special session was originally foreseen as a review meeting. However, in adopting the final document of the special session – the Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21 – the General Assembly did not limit itself to a mere assessment of the progress achieved and to a reconfirmation of commitments already made at UNCED. The Assembly advanced international understanding of a number of key issues on the sustainable development agenda, and adopted a number of important practical decisions and concrete recommendations for expediting progress in these areas.

3. The situation prior to the sixth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development provides more solid ground for optimism. Positive results were achieved and concrete commitments were made at the third meeting of the Conference of Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (Kyoto, Japan, 1-10 December 1997). The Commission's Intergovernmental Forum on Forests has been established and preparations are well under way for its first substantive meeting. Several Governments – of both developed and developing countries – have organized important meetings, including at a high political level, to provide inputs to the deliberations in the Commission. The number of local Agenda 21 initiatives continues to grow. Sustainable development issues are more frequently discussed in various national, regional and international forums. Greater attention to sustainable development has been demonstrated by parliaments and legislative assemblies. Continued support for – and high expectations in connection with – the work of the Commission on Sustainable Development are evident on the part of Governments, international organizations within and outside the United Nations system, and major groups. A stronger commitment to sustainable development and interest in the work of the Commission is being demonstrated by the private sector. The ongoing reform of the United Nations is expected to enable its Secretariat to provide more consistent and more effective support to sustainable development work at the global and country levels, and to build stronger partnerships with all the actors involved. For example, as the result of the integration of the normative, analytical and technical cooperation functions of the Secretariat, policy development work at Headquarters and country-level activities are expected to mutually enrich each other.

4. The two inter-sessional working groups of the Commission, which met earlier in 1998, concluded with constructive practical results and identified a number of key issues for further consideration by the Commission. The challenge for the sixth session of the Commission is to achieve tangible results, secure further commitment to action, and advance dialogue and understanding – both among Governments and between Governments and other partners – on the issues placed on its agenda.

5. As a result of the nineteenth special session of the General Assembly, the new programme of work of the Commission for the 1998-2002 period is better focused on strategic sustainable development issues, and provides for a more integrated consideration of the economic, social and environmental components of sustainable development in critical areas. While focusing on a limited number of issues included on the agenda of a given session, the new programme also facilitates early preparations for policy discussions on issues that are scheduled to take place at forthcoming sessions.

# II. Main challenges for the sixth session of the Commission

6. **The participants in the high-level meeting are invited to focus their attention on the issues on the agenda of the sixth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development set out below.**

## Strategic approaches to freshwater management

7. There is compelling evidence that the mismanagement of water resources could become a limiting factor to sustainable development in many parts of the world. An expert group meeting on strategic approaches to freshwater management (Harare, 27-30 January 1998), an international forum on the theme "Global water politics: cooperation for

transboundary water management" (Petersburg/Bonn, Germany, 3-5 March 1998) and an international conference on water and sustainable development (Paris, 19-21 March 1998) all stressed the need for an integrated approach to the management, development and equitable use of freshwater resource if a series of crises, potentially with regional and even global implications, are to be averted.

8. The ministerial declaration of the Paris conference called upon the international community to develop an agreed statement of principles to be applied in developing and implementing local and national water management systems and international cooperation to support them, taking into consideration the outcome of the Harare expert group meeting. The declaration also emphasized the importance of following up the guidance contained in the conference's programme of priority action.

9. **Based on the outcome of the above-mentioned forums, actions towards the integrated management of water resources need to be based on the following considerations:**

**(a) The need to recognize the river basin and aquifer systems as the spatial units of management. With regard to international watercourses, the Petersburg/Bonn forum concluded that a common understanding of cooperative management or a "shared vision" is critical for the effective management of international water resources;**

**(b) The conservation of freshwater and related ecosystems is vital to sustainable development. There is a need to promote an ecosystem approach in integrated water resources planning, development and management within the framework of river basin and aquifer systems;**

**(c) The effective assessment and management of water resources, including the prevention and mitigation of water-related disasters, requires adequate physical and socio-economic information flows. High priority needs to be given to the strengthening or establishment of local, national or international integrated water information systems;**

**(d) In view of the vital role of water, a finite and vulnerable resource, in connection with the satisfaction of basic human needs, food security, poverty alleviation and the functioning of ecosystems, water planning and management needs to be integrated into national economic management;**

**(e) High priority needs to be given to the strengthening of institutions and improving training and awareness of managers and users alike. There is a need to ensure the implementation of a participatory approach to water management in which women have an equal role. The role of Governments needs to be clearly defined with regard to policy formulation and regulatory measures on the one hand, and the direct management and provision of services on the other. The establishment of an enabling environment needs to be promoted in order to facilitate partnerships between public, private and community organizations, local authorities and non-governmental organizations;**

**(f) Increased financial resources will need to be mobilized for the sustainable development of freshwater resources. All costs must be recovered if the provision of water is to be viable. Subsidies for specific groups may be judged desirable within some countries. Due consideration needs to be given to enhancing private sector involvement. Governments and the international community need to strengthen consultation mechanisms for improving donor/recipient dialogues for the mobilization of financial resources in a well targeted and predictable manner.**

## Industry and sustainable development

10. Industry has a key role to play in achieving progress in all three objectives of sustainable development: creating economic growth, furthering social development and protecting the environment. A sustainable industry policy requires that these three dimensions be addressed within an integrated framework emphasizing a preventive approach. Today, Governments are seeking to develop policy packages that combine the traditional command-and-control measures with economic instruments and voluntary initiatives. Furthermore, such policy packages are most effective if developed in cooperation with key social groups. Industry, in turn, is expanding its actions based on corporate responsibility to cover the economic, social and environmental arenas. This involves an increasing use of tools for analysis and evaluation (life cycle analysis, environmental accounting, social auditing and indicators), guiding action (environmental management systems, eco-design, cleaner production and training) and communicating (social and environmental reporting). In this process, industry has increased its commitment to dialogue and cooperation with Governments, employees and other social groups.

11. **The participants in the high-level meeting may wish to consider how to:**

**(a) Further reform industrial policy, devise more appropriate regulatory systems and create a policy environment conducive to foreign direct investment that is supportive of sustainable development;**

**(b) Accelerate the development and dissemination of environmentally sound technologies through investment in infrastructure, education and training, and the creation of business/academic/government partnerships to strengthen domestic technological capabilities;**

**(c) Promote the development of voluntary industry initiatives, the reporting of quantitative targets set by the enterprises themselves and self-evaluation with respect to their achievements;**

**(d) Improve the monitoring of the environmental performance of industry by Government and develop national performance indicators, in particular where trade liberalization leads to rapid expansion of concentrated industrial production;**

**(e) Foster greater cooperation between Government, industry, trade unions and civil society in order to ensure the sustainability of social security arrangements, enhance social safety networks for those who are adversely affected by economic change and increase efforts to ensure universal compliance by industry with core labour standards.**

## Guidelines for consumer protection

12. National consumer policies provide an important but largely undeveloped tool for promoting sustainable consumption patterns and sustainable development. Consumers can make a major contribution to sustainable development provided that they have access to accurate information on the environmental impact of their consumption of goods and services, and choices of goods and services that are not environmentally harmful. Consumer policies can promote general consumer education concerning sustainable consumption, product information relating to sustainable production and consumption, protection against misleading environmental claims, economic incentives towards more sustainable consumption, and development planning that facilitates sustainable transportation, housing and energy and water consumption. Such policies should be developed and implemented by Governments, in cooperation with business, consumer organizations and other concerned groups, and supported by international cooperation.

13. **The participants in the high-level meeting may wish to consider priority issues for consumer policies to promote sustainable consumption, and how the Commission could best proceed to extend the guidelines on consumer protection to include issues of sustainable consumption, taking into account the proposed guidelines for sustainable consumption developed at the Interregional Expert Group Meeting on Consumer Protection and Sustainable Consumption (São Paulo, Brazil, 28-30 January 1998) (see E/CN.17/1998/5, annex).**

## Transfer of technology

14. Increased transfer of environmentally sound technologies from developed to developing countries is essential for sustainable development on a global basis. Such technology transfer should be based on partnerships between Governments, business, research and development institutions, and international organizations. Although Governments should establish policies and provide financial incentives and support for the transfer of environmentally sound technologies, business is generally best able to transfer the practical know-how, including management systems, product design and marketing, and equipment, for using new technologies in commercial production. Governments can promote and support the transfer of commercial technologies through private direct investment, private and public joint ventures, co-production and supply arrangements, licensing arrangements, and management and consultant services. Government support is particularly important in assisting small and medium-sized enterprises in making connections and arrangements for technology transfer.

15. The most effective technology transfer requires adaptation of the technology to local conditions and priorities, further development of the technology to adapt to changing conditions and markets, and ultimately, participation in the development of new technologies. Technology cooperation projects involving research and development institutions and commercial enterprises in developed and developing countries can generate new technologies designed for production in developing countries for both national needs and export markets. In most developing countries, this will require the strengthening of capacities for research and development and for adapting and managing new technologies. Since much basic research and development in both developed and developing countries is publicly funded, Governments have a particularly important role in promoting the development of new environmentally

sound technologies to meet the needs of both developing and developed countries. Small and medium-sized enterprises and research and development institutions particularly need support from Governments and international organizations in establishing international technology cooperation arrangements.

16. **The participants in the high-level meeting may wish to consider how Governments and international organizations can best promote and support the transfer of environmentally sound technology – especially when developed with public funds – and technology cooperation, in partnership with business and research and development institutions, and how they can best assist small and medium-sized enterprises in participating in such arrangements.**

### Capacity-building

17. The national capacity-building process can be most effective when it is driven by political commitment and a sense of ownership. Increased international cooperation and funding are needed to support and facilitate such national efforts. Countries can learn from each other's experiences by exchanging information, sharing case studies and enhancing networking. Capacity-building is increasingly becoming an integral part of subregional cooperation programmes, and such trends need to be further promoted.

18. **The participants in the high-level meeting may wish to consider ways in which positive developments in national capacity-building processes could be further promoted and how international support in this regard could be better orchestrated.**

### Education

19. Education is an integral part of the enabling framework for sustainable development. Education can be a driving force for changing values and mindsets, and can lead to behavioural changes towards more sustainable lifestyles. The concept of education for sustainable development needs to be widely understood as encompassing all disciplines, engaging all levels and modes of teaching and learning. The important next step would be to define required actions to be taken at the local, national and regional levels so as to reorient education towards sustainable development. These also need to be reflected in overall sustainable development strategies at those levels.

20. In this regard, the Commission work programme on education, training and public awareness, which was adopted in 1996 and is expected to be further discussed and elaborated at the present session, has a special significance. **The participants in the high-level meeting may wish to consider ensuring that the work programme be used to serve as a basic framework for action at all levels using all channels, and for partnerships among all actors concerned.**

### Science

21. The best scientific advisory processes seem to be those that combine scientific excellence and intellectual independence with a close dialogue and cooperation with policy makers and practitioners. There is a greater need to orient scientific research to become more action-oriented and interdisciplinary, and to build up scientific capacities at the national level through strengthening science education at all levels and mobilizing increased investment in research and development targeted to priority scientific themes of sustainable development. One important action to that end is the organization by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization of the high-level World Conference on Science in June 1999.

22. **The participants in the high-level meeting may wish to consider how the Commission might best contribute to the successful convening of the World Conference on Science and provide political impetus to the more effective mobilization of science for sustainable development.**

## III. Launching preparations for the seventh session of the Commission

### Protection of oceans and seas

23. It is expected that the discussion at the seventh session of the Commission on Sustainable Development will focus on implementation of the goals and objectives contained in chapter 17 of Agenda 21, as well as of more recent international initiatives, such as the Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities. The focus on oceans and seas in 1999 could provide an appropriate follow-up to the Commission's decision 4/15 of 1996, in which, *inter alia*, the Commission called for a periodic overall review by the Commission of all aspects of the marine environment and its related issues,

as described in chapter 17 of Agenda 21, for which the overall legal framework is provided by the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.

24. The seventh session of the Commission will also offer a timely opportunity to review and take stock of several relevant activities taking place in 1998 in the context of the International Year of the Ocean, as well as the world exposition at Lisbon on the theme "The oceans, a heritage for the future". Moreover, the Independent World Commission on the Oceans will conclude its work in August 1998, thus providing a useful basis for the Commission to develop recommendations for priority actions.

## Sustainable tourism

25. Tourism, both national and international, is a very large and growing economic sector, with important environmental and social as well as economic impacts. In some small island developing countries, tourism generates over half the gross national product. With its labour-intensive services, tourism can generate substantial employment and revenues in areas with tourist attractions; however, large numbers of tourists can cause severe environmental stress due to water consumption and pollution, waste generation and construction activities. Excessive stress in environmentally fragile areas, including coastal zones, mountain areas and wildlife habitats, can threaten ecosystems and biodiversity and even undermine the tourist business itself. Large-scale tourism, which is often seasonal and sometimes volatile, can also disrupt local social structures and cultural practices and values. On the other hand, with careful management, tourism can promote sustainable development.

26. **The participants in the high-level meeting may wish to consider priorities for national policies and international cooperation relating to tourism for discussion at the seventh session of the Commission. Participants may also wish to consider how the views of various stakeholders, possibly including the travel industry, environmental groups, public agencies concerned with eco-tourism and communities in tourist areas, could be brought into the discussion.**

## Changing consumption and production patterns

27. Long-term sustainable development for all countries will require both cleaner and more resource-efficient production technologies, as well as changes in consumption patterns, particularly in the industrialized countries. Changing consumer behaviour and lifestyles with respect to transportation, housing, household appliances, energy and water use, waste handling and other factors will be a slow and complex process. Public policies should promote increased public understanding of sustainable development, create economic incentives for sustainable consumption, and develop public infrastructure, land-use planning and social services that promote sustainable consumption. Governments should work together with business, educators, community organizations and other organizations of civil society in promoting sustainable consumption.

28. Production patterns should be made more sustainable through economic incentives, government regulations and voluntary business practices. Governments should cooperate with business in encouraging industrial environmental management systems and publication of information on the environmental impacts of goods and services, where possible based on assessment of production processes, distribution, use and disposal. Particular attention should be paid to improving the energy and resource efficiency of production processes. Efforts should be made to ensure that changes in production and consumption patterns in the industrialized countries do not present obstacles to sustainable development in developing countries.

29. **The participants in the high-level meeting may wish to consider priorities for changing consumption and production patterns, and to examine how Governments in developed and developing countries can cooperate with business, consumer organizations and other organizations of civil society in changing consumption patterns.**

## Preparations for the deliberations on energy in 2001

30. At its nineteenth special session, the General Assembly decided that the preparations for the Commission's deliberations in 2001 on the issue of energy within the context of sustainable development should be initiated at the seventh session of the Commission, in 1999, and should utilize an open-ended intergovernmental group of experts to be held in conjunction with inter-sessional meetings of the eighth (2000) and ninth (2001) sessions of the Commission. It is important to ensure that that forthcoming intergovernmental process provides an opportunity to elaborate strategic approaches to the sustainable

development energy agenda that would cover all types of energy and address all aspects of the contemporary energy discussion – economic, social and environmental.

31. **The participants in the high-level meeting may wish to voice their expectations in connection with this matter and address possible modalities of the intergovernmental process to be launched at the seventh session of the Commission. This will, *inter alia*, facilitate and give further guidance to the preparatory work for the 1999 deliberations in the Commission that has already started in the United Nations system under the aegis of the Inter-Agency Committee on Sustainable Development.**

### Sustainable development of small island developing States

32. At its seventh session, the Commission will serve, *inter alia*, as the preparatory body for the two-day special session of the General Assembly that will meet immediately preceding the opening of the fifty-fourth regular session of the Assembly in order to carry out a five-year comprehensive review of progress achieved in the implementation of the Global Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States. **The participants in the high-level meeting may wish to give further guidance to the preparatory work for the review that is currently under way.**

## IV. Regional cooperation and exchange of information

33. At its nineteenth special session, the General Assembly called upon the Commission on Sustainable Development to promote increased regional implementation of Agenda 21 in cooperation with relevant regional and subregional organizations and the regional commissions, and recommended that the Commission take into account regional developments related to the implementation of the outcomes of UNCED.

34. The Commission has an important role to play in promoting a thematic focus, catalysing linkages between key institutions at the national and regional levels and responding to priorities through consultations with interested regional organizations and agencies. Regional and subregional cooperation and information exchanges could be enhanced through increased opportunities for dialogue, interaction and networking among the regional and subregional entities concerned, both within and outside the United Nations system.

35. The General Assembly also recommended that the Commission provide a forum for the exchange of experience on regional and subregional initiatives and regional collaboration for sustainable development.

36. Since its first session, the Commission has regularly provided a forum for the exchange of national information, both through national presentations given by member States during the sessions of the Commission and its inter-sessional meetings and through voluntary national reporting on the implementation of Agenda 21, specifically as it relates to the agenda of each session of the Commission.

37. Regional exchange of national information would provide a third means of sharing experience and best practices in the implementation of Agenda 21. A particular challenge would be to add value to national information through regional and subregional analysis and exchange, thereby contributing to the work of the Commission on Sustainable Development on monitoring implementation of Agenda 21 and evaluating the effectiveness of national and regional policies for achieving sustainable development objectives.

38. **The participants in the high-level meeting may wish to consider how the role of the Commission as a platform for the exchange of regional and subregional experiences can be realized. It may also wish to support the proposal of the Economic Commission for Europe to undertake a pilot project to test modalities for the regional exchange of national information in support of the agenda of the Commission in the context of regional priorities.**

## V. Stronger partnerships with major groups

39. **The participatory spirit of Agenda 21, captured under the concept of major groups, continues to be a strength of the Commission on Sustainable Development. However, there is still a need to support and enhance the role and contributions of major groups in sustainable development if the participatory intent of Agenda 21 is to be fully realized. Urgent needs in this area include formalizing some of the participatory traditions established by the Commission and exploring ways to increase participation by major groups from developing countries. In this context, the participants in the high-level meeting may wish to consider and provide their guidance on the following:**

(a) **Ways and means of strengthening inter-sessional mechanisms for the participation of and consultation with major groups in the context of the Commission's work programme.** Such mechanisms could generate additional ideas and facilitate formal consideration of major group views during the sessions of the Commission and its inter-sessional working groups. They could also increase the demand on the part of major groups to engage in national and regional consultations on the issues included on the Commission's annual agendas and develop better coordinated responses;

(b) **Ensuring participation of key actors from the major groups in the "economic sector" discussions in the Commission throughout the 1999-2001 period, building upon the experience gained in the industry segment during the sixth session of the Commission;**

(c) **Utilizing better the "Day of ..." format, such as the Day of Women organized for 1998, as a way to encourage participation by a particular major group sector, and linking their concerns with the Commission's agenda in a given year.** A series of "Day of ..." events established and recognized in advance would help to mobilize the relevant major group sectors and enable greater participation. A Day of Indigenous People is already on the Commission agenda for 2000. Other Commission sessions could include a Day of Farmers in 1999 (in preparation for the sustainable agriculture focus the following year) and a Day of Non-Governmental Organizations in 2001 (which could be a useful follow-up to the suggested people's millennium assembly). The 10-year review of Agenda 21 implementation in 2002 could include a series of dialogue sessions or a similar set of consultative processes with all major groups;

(d) **Explore the feasibility and desirability of creating special funding arrangements with the aim of increasing the participation of major group organizations from developing countries.** At present, even with the tremendous effort of some large developed country non-governmental organizations, there is a significant gap in the numbers of major group participants from developing and developed countries. Participation in the work of the Commission is an excellent way to link local efforts with global objectives, and helps to mobilize entire communities once their representatives are able to take part in the dynamics of the Commission process.

# VI. Conclusion

40. **The participants in the high-level meeting are also encouraged to announce their intentions regarding any possible initiatives and inter-sessional activities that they plan to organize in the context of follow-up work to issues on the agenda of the sixth session of the Commission, as well as for an input to future sessions of the Commission.**